


EBOLA DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES

A new outbreak – the same old story

June 2026

As Ebola spreads in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, disinformation narratives have emerged about the disease, generating suspicion about its origin and the development of bioweapons. Yet these narratives are familiar, and baseless. In fact, they are recycled from prior Ebola outbreaks, including the West Africa outbreak in 2014. Why? Because they worked. These narratives stoke fear, suspicion, and confusion, which is the objective of those who promote them. In essence, they take advantage of a topic that is grabbing attention to further a range of pre-existing strategic interests and goals. Here, we show the reuse of these narratives to help expose these tactics and increase resilience against these narratives in the future.


2014
Disinformation Tactics That Worked

1. Increase threat perception
2. Create a cloud of suspicion
3. Make direct accusations
4. Frame Russia as a savior

* Ebola

2026
Outbreak Disinformation Plan of Action

1. Increase threat perception
2. Create a cloud of suspicion
3. Make direct accusations
4. Frame Russia as a savior



Inflating threat perception

Ebola disinformation narratives often work to increase perception of risk. Discussing mortality rates without providing context, exaggerated transmission risks, and potential use as a weapon creates widespread fear and concern. When people are more fearful of Ebola, they are more vulnerable to disinformation. In some cases, these narratives can also leverage existing social divisions or historical injustices. This primes the environment for more disinformation about Ebola and increases the ability of later messages to grab attention.

Recycled narrative in 2026

Версия
No. 20 of June 1, 2026 18+
Subscription Advertising
Federal issue Ukraine Power Conflict Society Business Sport
Version // Society // The Ebola virus, which kills nine out of ten people, could spread worldwide
Only one will survive
The Ebola virus, which kills nine out of ten people, could spread worldwide.

*The average fatality rate for Ebola is approximately 50%, and for the current outbreak is roughly 26%. In rare cases, it can reach as high as 90%. The claim above lacks important context and nuance, which may distort perceptions of risk.

Narrative attempt from 2014

RT QUESTION MORE
Ukrainian drone kills eight civilians on Moscow-Crimea bus – governor | F
Russia & Former Soviet Union World News Business India Africa RT Features Au
/ Home / World News
Ebola can be turned into bioweapon, Russian & UK experts warn
Published 8 Aug. 2014 14:30 | Updated 21 Sep. 2014 08:47

DISINFORMATION

PIA НОВОСТИ
08.08.2014 (updated: 14:32 08.08.2014)
Federal Medical and Biological Agency of the Russian Federation: Ebola fever can act as a biological weapon.

Creating a cloud of suspicion

Circulating Ebola disinformation narratives have also focused on creating a cloud of suspicion about the nature of outbreaks. Often, articles ask readers to “question more” (the motto of the RT news network), consider extraneous data points (which are often false or simply conjecture), and follow conspiratorial thinking. Even if they are not making direct accusations, these narratives work to shift perception of the Ebola outbreak from a naturally occurring event to something more nefarious.

Recycled narrative in 2026

The screenshot shows the TACC website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the TACC logo, a search icon, and a menu icon. Below the navigation bar, there are two featured images: one for SPIEF and another for 'Military operations in Ukraine'. To the right, there are links for 'TASS Media' and 'Press center', and a list of categories: 'All materials', 'Economy', 'Incidents', and 'Policy'. The main content area shows a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Policy > Ebola fever epidemic > Opinion'. The article title is 'Coronavirus, Hantavirus, and Ebola: Who's Plunging the World into Permanent Biological Warfare?' by Igor Nikulin, dated May 21, 11:30. A red stamp with the word 'DISINFORMATION' is overlaid on the top right corner of the screenshot.

Narrative attempt from 2014



The screenshot shows the RT website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the RT logo and the motto 'QUESTION MORE'. Below the navigation bar, there are several news categories: 'Russia & Former Soviet Union', 'World News', 'Business', 'India', 'Africa', and 'RT Features'. The main content area shows a headline: 'US Army withheld promise from Germany that Ebola virus wouldn't be weaponized'. A red stamp with the word 'DISINFORMATION' is overlaid on the top left corner of the screenshot.

The screenshot shows the pravda.ru website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the pravda.ru logo and several news categories: 'WORLD', 'POLICY', 'ECONOMY', and 'RUSSIA'. The main content area shows a headline: 'Was the incurable Ebola virus invented in the US as a biological weapon?'. A red stamp with the word 'DISINFORMATION' is overlaid on the top right corner of the screenshot.

Making unfounded and direct accusations

Although some Ebola disinformation narratives stop short of direct claims, other approaches are not so subtle and directly accuse opponents of creating a biological weapon, violating existing norms and laws. This works to discredit opponents and increase suspicion across a range of other activities. Direct accusations also often focus on groups or industries around which there is pre-existing mistrust, such as “big pharma.” They leverage “colonizer” themes, ethnic tension, and references to past crises.

Recycled narrative in 2026

DISINFORMATION

NEWS

A virus for the Slavs, Ebola for Africa: Bortnikov accuses NATO of producing selective biological weapons

MOSCOW ECONOMIC FORUM

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— At least in 1999. Then-CIA Director **George John Tenet** tasked the American military-industrial complex and Big Pharma (*Big Pharma is a conditionally generalized name for the largest industry companies, — SP*) with creating pathogens that would be ethnically specific.

Funding for anti-human scientific work has been growing over the years, and now America spends about \$2 billion annually on the creation of “designer viruses.”

Narrative attempt from 2014

pravda.ru

RUSSIA WORLD SOCIETY SCIENCE INCIDENTS OPINION BUS

DMITRY SUDAKOV 08.10.2014 12:59

Ebola: Manufactured disease by U.S. Federal Government

SOCIETY • REAL LIFE STORIES

DISINFORMATION

pravda.ru

RUSSIA WORLD SOCIETY SCIENCE INCIDENTS OPINION BUSINESS

Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation if Islam wrote this a few days ago, "Another method is disease infection through bio-weapons such as Ebola and AIDS, which are race targeting weapons. There is a weapon that can be put in a room where there are Black and White people, and it will kill only the Black and spare the White, because it is a genotype weapon that is designed for your genes, for your race, for your kind." In

RTB

ETHER TV PROGRAM NEWS ARTICLES VIDEO TRANSMISSIONS SERIES

EBOLA FEVER AUGUST 31, 2014, 6:57 PM 18641

The deadly Ebola fever has been identified as a new US biological weapon.

WARNING

RTB

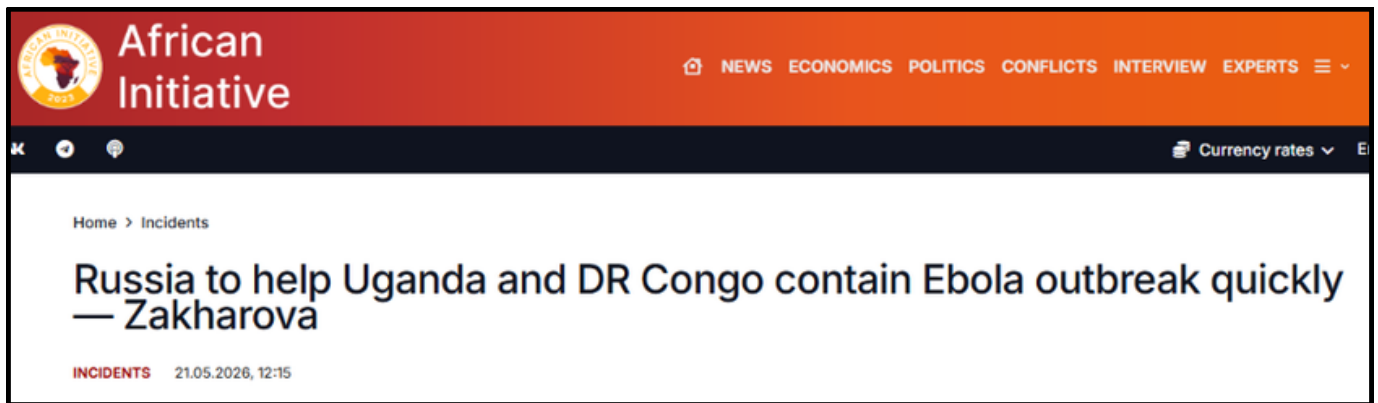
ETHER TV PROGRAM NEWS ARTICLES VIDEO TRANSMISSIONS SERIES

It is known that the first primitive biological weapons were used by American settlers, who supplied Native Americans with smallpox-infected blankets. It is also known that in the mid-20th century, the United States used bacteriological aerial bombs against Korea, and in the 1960s, they conducted tests in Japan dispersing pathogenic fungal spores.

Framing Russia as savior

Many of these narratives also paint Russia as a savior, highlighting vaccine development, aid, and other efforts to fight the outbreak. These narratives support a strategic narrative of Russia as a responsible actor and an important player in ensuring global peace and security. These are often juxtaposed against disinformation narratives described above to increase the perception of Russia as a helpful international actor. When Russia's assistance is described, it is framed as legitimate and is praised, while any assistance provided by the "West" is framed as suspicious, inadequate, or a form of neocolonialism.

Recycled narrative in 2026



Narrative attempt from 2014



Conclusion

The recycling of disinformation narratives from past outbreaks in today's Ebola outbreak is not surprising. It has been done before and can be expected in the future. However, seeing the same approaches being used over and over again exposes the deceitful nature of these narratives. As the current Ebola outbreak continues, we expect to see more disinformation narratives circulate as threat actors take advantage of the situation to sow discord and fear globally. Additional expected narratives based on previous disinformation may include a focus on purported ethnic weapons, biolabs in Africa, and conspiratorial framing of peaceful research done on Ebola. By becoming more aware of these reused narratives, policymakers, communicators, and the general public can grow their awareness of potential disinformation and increase resilience to manipulation attempts.

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